



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**TOWARD A PRAGMATIC CONCEPTION OF METAPHOR**

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# **TOWARD A PRAGMATIC CONCEPTION OF METAPHOR**

**By**

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Much research has discussed metaphor from different angles and through the centuries, rhetoricians have enriched the study of metaphor by focusing on its various aspects. Rhetoricians' conceptions of metaphor have been always developed along various lines. They can be mainly classified into two general categories: the traditional conceptions and the new ones.

The purpose of the present study was to trace the development of the conception of metaphor from the classical point of view to the modern one. The proper comprehension of metaphor cannot be realised without the knowledge of the development of the conceptions of metaphor. Therefore, this study aimed to

complement other studies related to metaphor by placing the whole line of its development in perspective.

The study found out that there are two main conceptions in the literature of metaphor: The classical conception and the modern one. The classical conception views metaphor as a play with words, an unnecessary use of language that causes misunderstanding while the modern conception views metaphor as a tool to investigate our comprehension of things.

This study claims that the development in the conception of metaphor from the classical point of view to the modern has been a result of two observations that modern rhetoricians have noticed. The first observation is that metaphor is pervasive in our language and the second is that metaphor is related to our thinking and our conceptual system.

In addition to this, the present study advocates a pragmatic conception of metaphor, that is, as a tool with which we can develop research in many scientific disciplines. The present study has proposed new domains in which the study of metaphor could benefit the researchers. The study focused on selected disciplines mainly psychology, sociology, and political science. However, other disciplines can also make use of metaphor and those need to be investigated based on the pragmatic conception of metaphor.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sastera

## **MENUJU KONSEP METAFORA YANG PRAGMATIK**

**Oleh**

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Banyak kajian telah membincangkan metafora dari sudut berlainan dan menerusi zaman ahli retorik telah memperkayakan bidang kajian metafora dengan memberi tumpuan kepada pelbagai aspek. Konsep metafora ini telah diperkembangkan zaman berzaman. Konsep tersebut boleh dibahagikan kepada dua kategori umum, iaitu konsep tradisional dan konsep baru.

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengesan perkembangan konsep metafora dari segi pandangan klasik kepada yang moden. Pemahaman sebenar metafora tidak akan dapat direalisasikan tanpa pengetahuan tentang perkembangan konsep metaphora. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memperkaya lagi kajian lain yang berkaitan dengan

metafora dengan meletakkan setiap perkembangan metafora pada perspektifnya. Kajian ini telah menunjukkan bahawa terdapat dua konsep utama dalam sastera metafora, iaitu konsep klasik dan konsep moden. Konsep klasik memperlihatkan metafora sebagai penggunaan perkataan-perkataan yang kreatif, yakni suatu penggunaan bahasa yang boleh mencetuskan salahfaham. Manakala, konsep moden memperlihatkan metafora sebagai alat untuk menyiasat kefahaman kita dalam sesuatu hal.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa perkembangan konsep metafora dari pandangan klasik kepada pandangan moden adalah akibat dua pemerhatian yang dibuat oleh ahli retorik moden. Pemerhatian pertama ialah penggunaan metafora adalah meluas dalam bahasa dan kedua, metafora adalah berkaitan dengan pemikiran dan sistem konseptual.

Tambahan pula, kajian ini juga mengemukakan satu konsep metafora yang pragmatik, iaitu sebagai alat untuk memperkembangkan penyelidikan dalam banyak disiplin sains. Ia juga membentangkan domain baru yang mana kajian dalam metafora dapat memberi manfaat kepada penyelidik. Kajian ini menumpu kepada beberapa disiplin tertentu terutamanya dalam bidang psikologi, sosiologi dan sains politik. Walaubagaimanapun, metafora juga boleh diaplikasikan dalam disiplin lain dan ini perlu dikaji berdasarkan konsep metaphora yang pragmatik.

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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 28th March 2001 to conduct the final examination of Charbati Youssef on his Master of thesis entitled "Toward a Pragmatic Conception of Metaphor" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.



Charbati Youssef

Date: 6-6-2001

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation is about the development of the conception of metaphor through different periods and how a new, pragmatic view can be conceptualized. There are two central conceptions of metaphor in the literature. The traditional one is that of Aristotle, seventeenth-century thinkers, and Romanticists. There is, then, the modern conception of metaphor that appeared in the twentieth-century vis-à-vis the work of Richards (1936) and more importantly, that of Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

The present study thus traced the development of the conception of metaphor from the classical point of view to the modern one. It also attempted to advocate a new conception of metaphor and proposes new domains in which the study of metaphor could benefit researchers.

#### **Background to the Study**

Much research has discussed metaphor from different angles (Soskice: 1986) and through the centuries, rhetoricians have enriched the study of metaphor by focusing on its various aspects. However, the way in which it is presented and used in various spheres of human activity has tended to cause confusion. For example, the way it is presented at school is confusing. Cooper (1986) recalls of the disappointment he had when his teachers discussed metaphor. He remembers that they were told in the

English language class that metaphor is merely one of the figures of speech, but in English literature lessons, the distinction between metaphor and the other figures of speech like *metonymy*, *hyperbole* and *irony* was ignored. He remembers that the students at that time were given the impression that metaphor was confined to the belles-lettres texts.

More important is the fact that the different conceptions of metaphor held now by researchers are those that have been dominant in the different periods of its development. The most widely known conception of metaphor is that it is a play with words, a trick that we use for the sake of decoration. This conception of metaphor is a classical conception advocated by Aristotle during the Greek period. Some researchers have adopted the classical conception of Seventeenth-Century thinkers of metaphor. They consider metaphor as a deviation from the correct use of language in that it aims at misleading one's sense of judgment. Chomsky (1956, cited in Cooper, 1986: 56) appears to have conceived metaphor in the sense of the seventeenth-century thinkers. He considers metaphor "as a violation of selectional restrictions". Equally important is the way other writers see metaphor as a source of delight and pleasure. Like the Romanticist thinkers, Swanson (1972, cited in Soskice, 1985: 162) believes that "in metaphor we are launched into a creative, inventive, pleasurable act". Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have adopted Richard's (1936) modern conception of metaphor, that is, they adopt the pragmatic conception that assumes that metaphor has a role to play in understanding our thinking and ourselves. However, the different conceptions that we may have, would tend to



make our understanding of metaphor more of a blur rather than a properly perceived entity.

With the advent of the twentieth-century, there appeared a modern conception of metaphor that has tended to use it as a tool to develop scientific research, and which has since achieved good results in terms of arriving at a better understanding of metaphorical thought (Lakoff and Johnson: 1980). This modern conception tries to use metaphor as a tool to uncover our conceptual system, the way we think and the way we conceptualize things. However, the lack of consensus that still characterizes the conception of metaphor seems to have hindered any scientific benefit rising directly from the field of study.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The study of metaphor continues to suffer from the lack of any agreement about the precise way in which it might be conceived. Researchers do not seem to agree on one understanding of metaphor, and many of them do not seem to be aware that they are adopting the classical conception of metaphor. A study of the development of the conception of metaphor is needed to expose readers to the different conceptions that have emerged through time, and enrich their knowledge further and to help them have a clearer conception of it. Since the lack of consensus that exists now hinders any potential benefit from metaphorical thought, a study that promises to enrich our knowledge about metaphor and to help us toward a clearer understanding of the concept is needed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the development of the conception of metaphor from Aristotle until the present. This relatively long period of time will include the Greek period, the seventeenth-century era, the romantic period, and the twentieth-century. More specifically, this study aimed to:

- (i) classify the major studies that have dealt with metaphor conceptualization;
- (ii) show the stage that metaphor studies have reached; and
- (iii) show how metaphor can help in the development of scientific thought, that is, how its proper conception can be used as a tool to investigate selected areas of modern scientific thought, particularly in the fields of sociology, psychology, and political science.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- i) What is the path that the conception of metaphor has taken from Aristotle until now? What are Aristotle's, the seventeenth-century rhetoricians', the Romanticists', and the twentieth-century's conceptions of metaphor?
- ii) How can we classify the various conceptions of metaphor?
- iii) What is the stage that metaphor studies have reached?
- iv) How can a pragmatic view of metaphor help in the development of scientific research in selected fields?

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The following explanation of the study refers to the schematic model on page 9. This study is concerned with the development of the conception of metaphor. It claims that there are two conceptions of metaphor: a classical conception and a modern one. Thus, the study will trace how the development of the conception of metaphor from the classical to the modern has occurred. It claims that this development has been as the result of two observations that modern rhetoricians have noted.

The first observation is that metaphor is pervasive in our language and the second is that metaphor is related to our thinking and our conceptual system. Hence, the study hoped to establish that the development of the conception of metaphor referred to has been a result of the development of the view of rhetoricians toward the extent of the pervasiveness of metaphor on one side and the relation of metaphor to thought on the other.

The idea that metaphor is pervasive in our language was a prerequisite to the development of metaphor from the classical conception to the modern one. The belief that metaphors pervade our language is what urges rhetoricians to see that not only our language is metaphorical but also our thought. Because some rhetoricians have remarked that metaphors are pervasive, they have concluded that this is because thinking is carried out in terms of metaphors.

The classical conception of metaphor is based on the assumption that metaphor is a trope, that is, metaphor is a play with words, a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary use of language. The modern conception of metaphor is based on the assumption that metaphor is the basis of our language, that is, metaphors are so pervasive in our language that they form an integral part of the normal use of language and not just a result of the tendency to decorate style.

However, the move from the classical conception to the modern did not happen abruptly but as a gradual process that took place over different periods. Each period has contributed to the development of metaphor conception. To see how this has happened, this study focuses on Aristotle, seventeenth-century rhetoricians, the romanticists, and the Twentieth-Century rhetoricians.

Aristotle views metaphor as an extra play with words that makes language more beautiful and attractive in order to alleviate boredom (Soskice: 1985). Being an extra use of language, metaphors do not pervade language. Aristotle does not mention any relationship existing between metaphor and our thinking. Metaphor according to him is related to language and has nothing to do with thought.

Seventeenth-century rhetoricians adopted Aristotle's point of view and added their own conclusions (Locke: 1690). Like Aristotle, they see that metaphor is a play with words; but unlike him, they concluded that it should not be used. Metaphor, according to them, is a tool of imagination, intuition, and feelings. It is a play with words; an unnecessary decoration of language, which results in misleading our sense

of judgment. Thinkers in that era discouraged the use of metaphor and encouraged instead exactness which could be realized only by literal language. They see neither the pervasiveness of language nor its relation to thought.

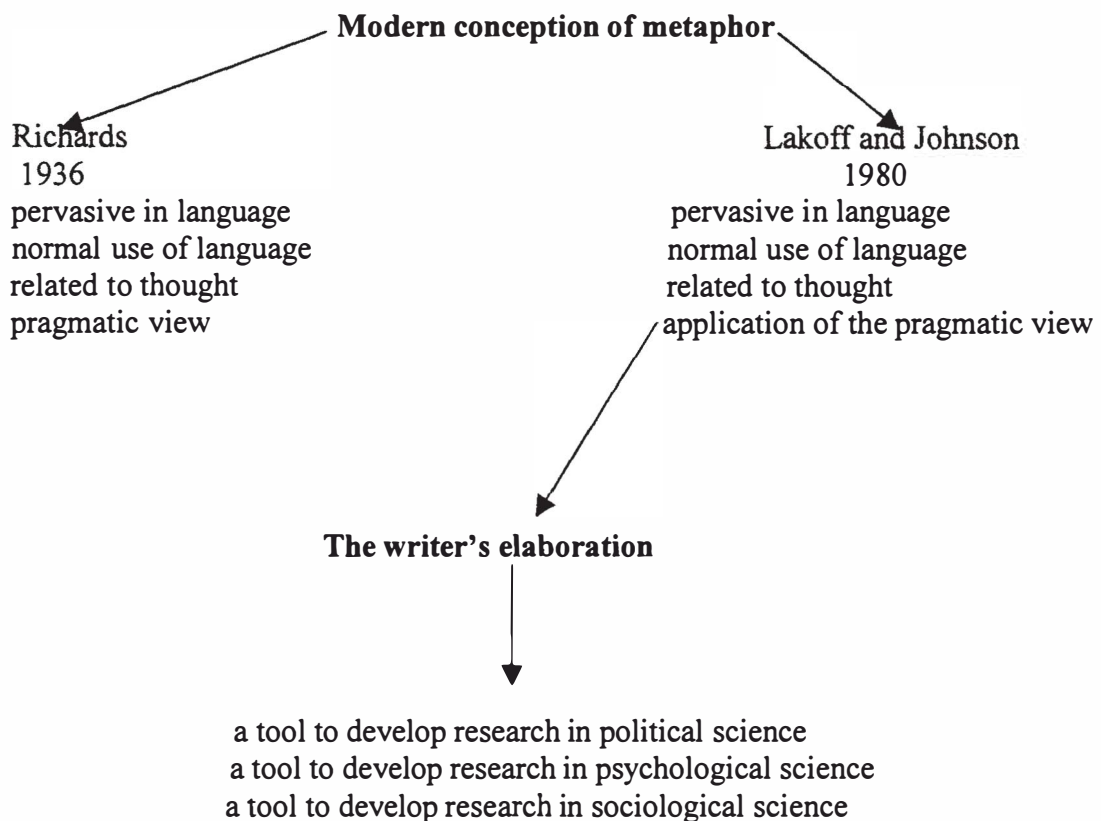
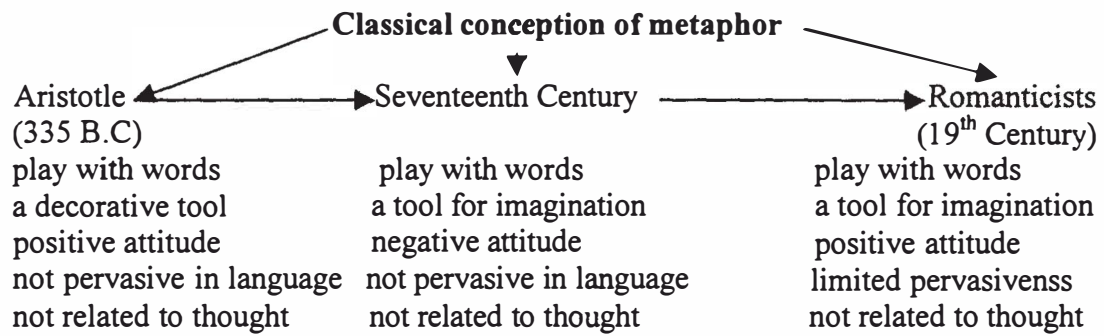
Seventeenth-century rhetoricians' belief that metaphor is a tool of imagination, feelings and intuition was adopted by romanticists (Richards: 1936). However, instead of calling for the rejection of metaphor as Seventeenth-Century thinkers have advocated, Romanticists, on the other hand, believe that metaphor has an important value as it enables us to express our imagination and free our feelings. They also see the pervasiveness of metaphor in language but this pervasiveness is limited since it was only the poets who used metaphors widely. Thus, according to the romanticist school, metaphor is a matter of extraordinary use of language. Besides, they do not see that metaphors as possibly having some pragmatic importance. In other words, they do not see that metaphors can be used as a tool to uncover our latent concepts.

Twentieth-century rhetoricians adopted the idea that metaphor is pervasive in our language and have added their own observations (Lakoff and Johnson: 1980). They assert that metaphor is pervasive because our language is metaphorical and that human beings tend to see abstract things in terms of metaphors. According to them, metaphor is a matter of the ordinary rather than the extraordinary use of language. In their attempt to account for the reason for which language is pervaded by metaphors, they have reasoned that our language is metaphorical because our thought is metaphorical. In short, we comprehend things in terms of metaphors. Depending on

such ideas, Twentieth-Century rhetoricians see the importance of metaphor in comprehending our conception of things. This gave birth to the pragmatic view of metaphor.

Therefore, the stage that the conception of metaphor has reached is the pragmatic point of view of metaphor. It is argued that the modern conception transcends the limited view that sees metaphor as a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish (e.g. Richards: 1936). Instead the proposed conception of metaphor additionally sees the importance of metaphor in the development of scientific thought. Put simply, it must be now viewed as a tool of discovery of our conceptual system and of our perception of the world.

Recently there have been many works on metaphor from within the pragmatic view. Shane (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/2253/intima.html>)- for example- focuses on the pragmatic side of metaphor by viewing it as a tool to understand how people use it to create intimacy. Another important work carried out within the pragmatic, conception of metaphor context is that by the Union of International Association (<http://www.uia.org/homemeta.htm>). The Union believes that metaphors are of unique importance as a means of communicating complex notions, especially in multicultural dialogue, which can facilitate cultural understanding and cooperation.



### Conceptual Framework of the Development in Metaphor Conception

It is important to mention that what is meant by “the writer’s elaboration” in this schematic model is the present study or investigation into how metaphor can be useful to sociology, psychology and political sciences. It is an application of Lakoff and Johnson’s theory vis-a’-vis some selected disciplines.



### **Significance of the Study**

This study expects to fill the gap in studies on metaphor. It is noted that there is research concerning the study of metaphor from the classical point of view (Richards: 1936) as well as from the new point of view (Lakoff and Johnson: 1980). However, there appears to be no study that traces the development of metaphor from the classical point of view to the modern one and how this development has taken place.

It can be said that the comprehension of metaphor cannot happen without the knowledge of the development of the conception of metaphor. Therefore, this study aims to place the whole line of metaphor development in perspective. Since the different points of view of metaphor that we have now are what have been held in the past, a study of the development of the conception of metaphor helps in understanding the background of the current conceptions.

Researchers from other disciplines can benefit from this study in developing their fields of interest. This study hopes to show that metaphor should be viewed pragmatically and that metaphor could be used as a tool with which we can develop many scientific disciplines such as psychology, sociology and political sciences.